

# Moving from Compliance to Results

**Results-Driven Accountability seeks to change the way schools educate students with disabilities**

*Julia Hartwig*

**W**hen it comes to educating students with disabilities, we've made progress over the years but still have a long ways to go.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) gave us a big push forward by establishing a number of requirements that states must meet in educating students with disabilities. However, the reliance is on states meeting certain standards and requirements, not on student achievement.

As a result, we have not seen better outcomes for students with disabilities in many important areas. This national trend plays out in Wisconsin where both reading and mathematics scores for students with disabilities have remained low and unchanged even though school districts throughout the state remain in significant compliance with the law.

Due to the lack of growth in outcome measures across the country, the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has

shifted from a compliance-only accountability system to one that includes compliance and results for students with disabilities.

This shift toward a balanced special education accountability system is called Results-Driven Accountability (RDA). The federal government is now holding states accountable for both compliance and outcomes for students with disabilities and is requiring states to implement a similar system of accountability for local school districts.

## ■ Focus on Literacy

Phase One of RDA required states to engage in a number of activities to determine a direction for a state-specific system of accountability and supports. This step included data analysis, infrastructure analysis, selection of a focus area, and identification of improvement strategies.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) worked

with a number of stakeholders throughout these processes. For the state's area of focus, stakeholders selected literacy. The state has low reading proficiency rates for students within all disability categories beginning in the earliest tested grades, and declining over time. Moreover, reading was identified as a high-leverage area that impacts many other outcome measures (i.e. graduation, dropout, mathematics). Due to the focus on literacy, Wisconsin is calling its RDA system "Reading Drives Achievement: Success through Literacy."

A multitude of stakeholder input was compiled to select broad, evidence-based improvement strategies (see Wisconsin's RDA Theory of Action on page 21). One major improvement strategy includes implementing a coordinated system of district improvement supports.

DPI is beginning the process of examining the systems, structures, and processes within its Title I and

## TIMELINE FOR WISCONSIN'S RESULTS-DRIVEN ACCOUNTABILITY IMPLEMENTATION

● 2015-16

Procedural Compliance Self-Assessment (PCSA)

Pilot new version of RDA-focused PCSA.

Local Education Agency Determinations

DPI will begin phasing outcome measures into LEA determinations; however, compliance will still be weighted greater than results.

Special Education Teams in order to streamline operations. This vision includes a more coordinated system of monitoring and improvement planning supports in order to assist districts in aligning visioning and improvement planning at the district level, eliminating duplication of effort, and focusing on the most effective practices to increase effectiveness, thereby increasing student outcomes.

**What Will Change for Districts?**

The way that school special education programs are assessed will change. During the 2015-16 school year, the DPI will pilot a new version of the Procedural Compliance Self-Assessment (PSCA), which is used to determine if schools are meeting requirements laid out by IDEA and state statutes. The new version of this assessment has been

changed to focus on requirements with the greatest impact on improving outcomes, particularly related to literacy, for students with disabilities.

During the 2016-17 school year, the new PCSA will be suspended to focus on training and engage in further piloting. Full implementation of the new PCSA will begin in the 2017-18 school year. Technical assistance and training materials are currently under development.

A second change will come with special education accountability determinations. Each year, the federal government issues state accountability determinations of compliance with IDEA requirements. DPI, in turn, makes annual Local Education Agency (LEA) determinations. With the phase-in of RDA, the federal government began giving outcome and compliance measures equal weight in their 2013-14 state

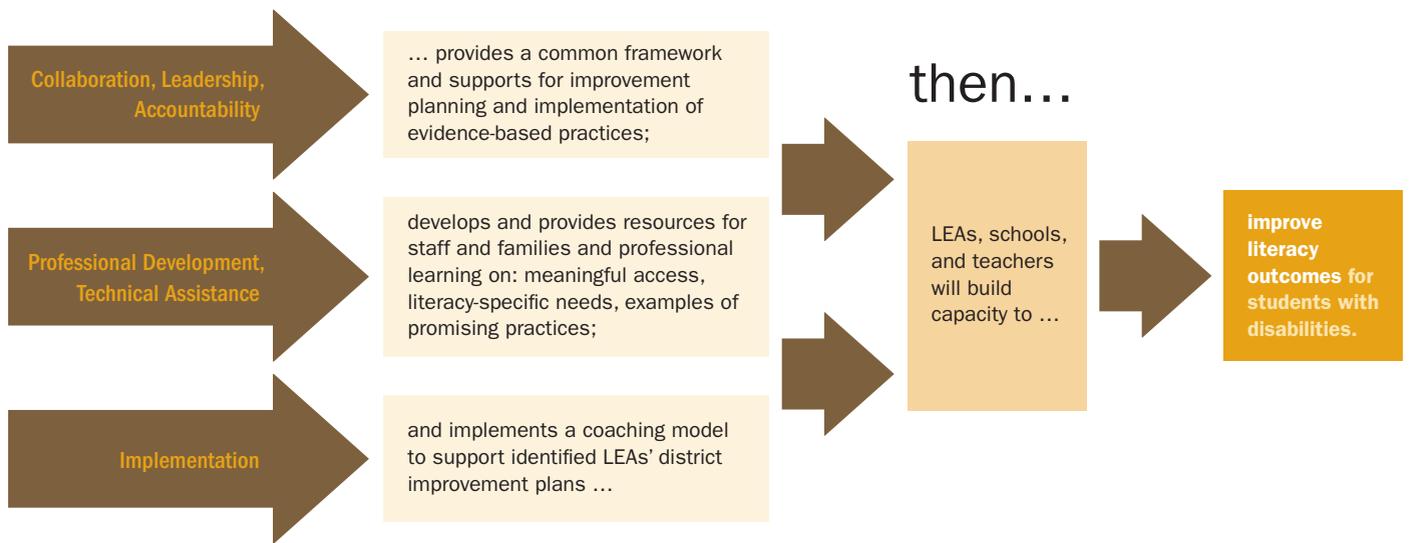
determinations. Wisconsin has met expectations both years, largely due to strong compliance measures. DPI will begin phasing outcome measures into LEA determinations beginning with the 2015-16 school year data, and will evolve to a balanced approach between compliance and outcome measures for the 2017-18 school year.

Lastly, the coordinated improvement planning and improvement resources outlined above will begin to phase in over the next three years as well. Based on accountability determinations and other criteria, identified districts will be invited to participate in supported improvement planning.

**What Can Districts Do to Prepare?**

The most impactful preparation for RDA is to strengthen instruction and systems of support to move toward

**If DPI...**



**then...**

**2016-17**

PSCA suspended – focus on training and technical assistance. Continue piloting new version of RDA-focused PCSA.

DPI continues phasing outcome measures into LEA determinations; again, compliance will still be weighted greater than results. DPI begins identifying areas that need assistance.

**2017-18**

1st year of new RDA-focused PCSA.

For the first time, there will be an equal weight given to compliance and outcome measure in the LEA determinations. DPI continues identifying areas that needs assistance.

## Preparing for RDA Implementation

There are many efforts that districts are already undertaking that support a move toward Results-Driven Accountability (RDA). Here are some things districts are encouraged to do to continue this effort:

- **Engage families** in meaningful ways.
- **Ensure systems**, such as Response to Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavior and Intervention Supports (PBIS), are in place for continuous monitoring of student progress data and adjusting instruction as needed. (PBIS is a proactive approach to establishing the behavioral supports and social structure needed for all students to achieve social, emotional and academic success. RtI is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning behavior needs. The RtI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.)
- **Ensure meaningful access** to high-quality, standards-based curriculum and instruction.
- **Facilitate collaboration** between special and general educators.
- **Adopt the DPI's Promoting Excellence for All** practices, which are aimed at close achievement gaps. For more information, visit [statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/excforall](http://statesupt.dpi.wi.gov/excforall)
- **Infuse cultural responsiveness** and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). (UDL is an educational framework based on research in the learning sciences, that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences.)
- **Implement college- and career-ready** individual education plans.
- **Focus individual education program meetings** on desired outcomes with a clear path of support to meet individualized needs.
- **Coordinate professional learning** and ensure connections between initiatives are clear and understood by all staff.

increased outcomes for students with disabilities, particularly in the area of reading. It is important to stay the course, working toward the goals of State Superintendent Tony Evers' Agenda 2017 as RDA aligns well with them. Some other ways to prepare include:

Most districts are in some phase of implementing a multi-level system of support (Response to Intervention or Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, see above), which uses data-based decision-making processes to ensure instruction is meeting the needs of all students. Districts that mindfully and systemically implement such systems are well poised to ensure just-in-time supports to maximize student success.

Students with disabilities should be an explicit part of professional

learning community conversations within these systems of support. Additionally, implementing strategies such as those within the Universal Design for Learning framework (see above) as well as ensuring cultural responsiveness is infused throughout all operations of the district will help ensure all students are meaningfully

Outcomes for students with disabilities are the responsibility of both special education and general education; true change will come through a system-wide collaborative approach.

Aligning RDA efforts with initiatives that already have momentum and leveraging currently effective practices while pinpointing needed changes will help actualize results while minimizing additional and isolated efforts.

Next steps for Wisconsin include embarking on Phase Two of RDA, which focuses on developing detailed action and

evaluation plans. Those interested in participating in stakeholder-input sessions can contact the Special Education team at DPI at [dpisped@dpi.wigov](mailto:dpisped@dpi.wigov). ■

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**For More Detailed information...** regarding RDA, visit OSEP's website at [bit.ly/OSEP-RDA](http://bit.ly/OSEP-RDA). Or watch DPI's video "What RDA Means in Wisconsin" at [bit.ly/1fpBKmi](http://bit.ly/1fpBKmi).